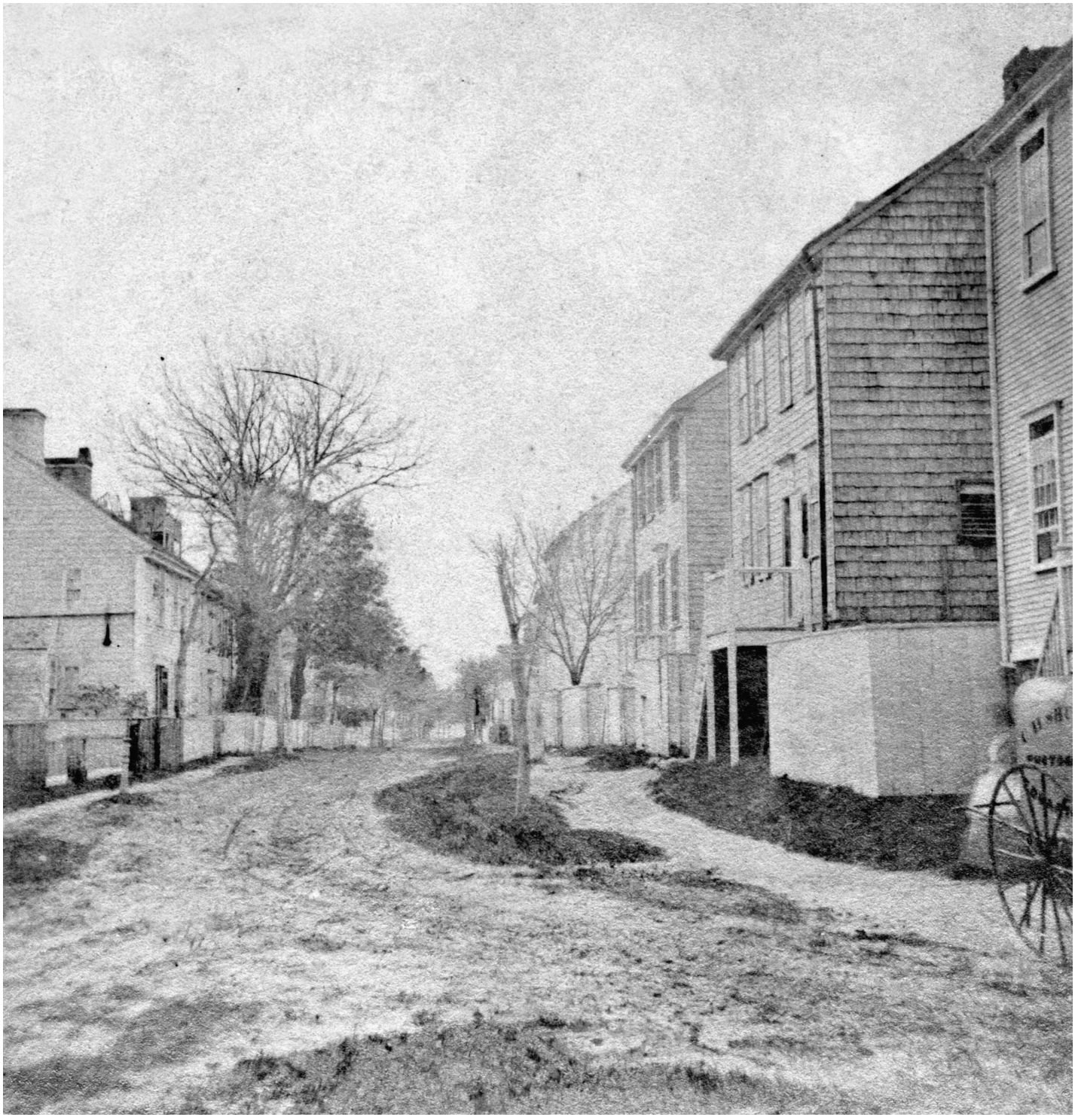
26 North Water Street

NANTUCKET

A House History



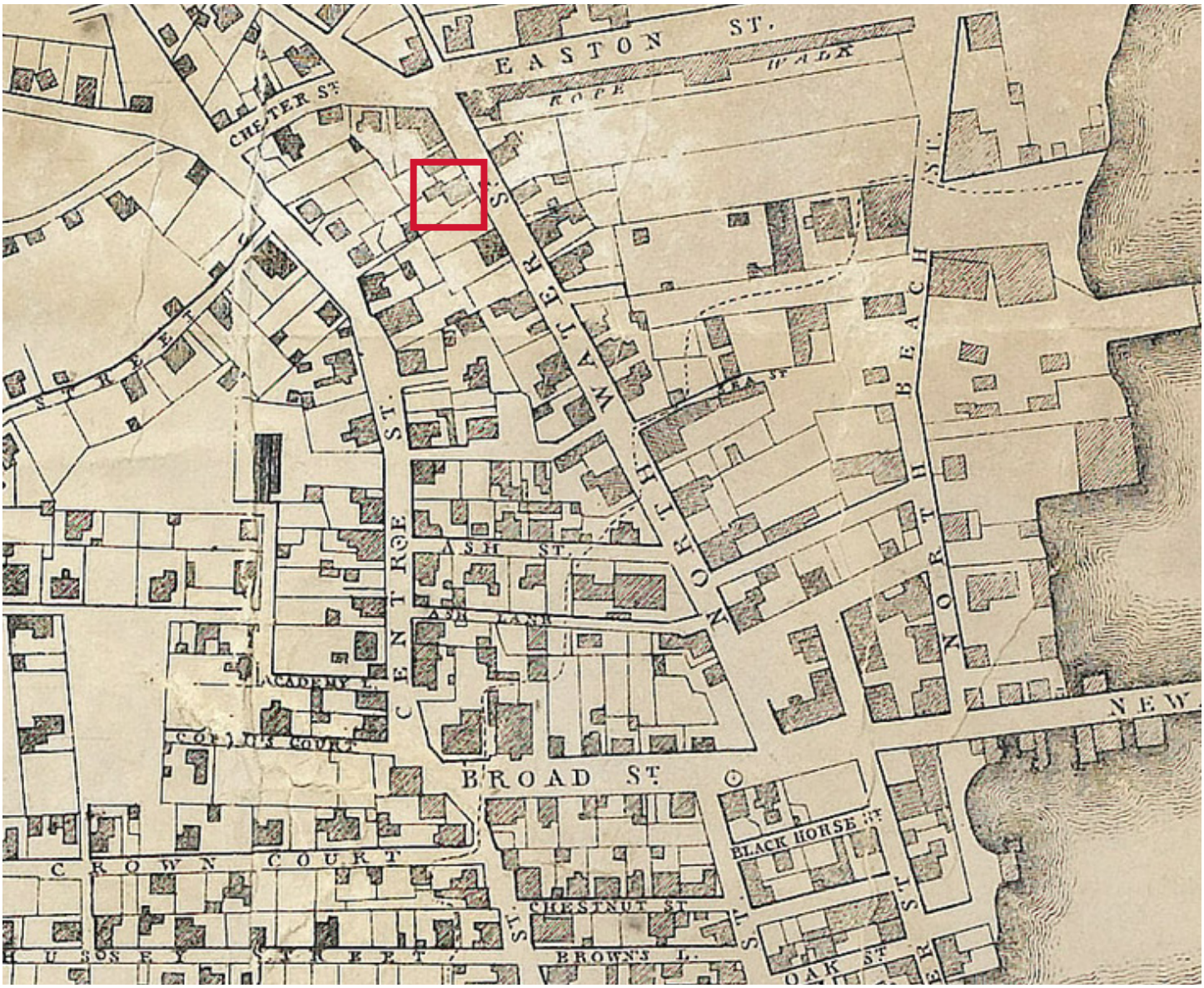
North Water near Easton Street looking east, circa 1870. 26 North Water is third house on the right.

A Brief History

26 North Water Street

26 North Water Street at right, circa 1860s. Photograph by C. H. Shute & Son, Edgartown, Mass.

The area we know today as North Water Street was originally called Water Street, beginning at Easton Street, making an eastward jog at Broad Street, and turning south to the bottom of Main Street—the last jog now known as South Water Street. When the Great Fire of 1846 swept the island, houses on North Water Street south of Sea Street and Ash Street were destroyed, but those farther north, including this house, were spared.



Coffin Map detail, 1834

The early history of 26 North Water Street remains a mystery. In his description of the area written in 1901, Henry Barnard Worth identifies the house as built by Richard Swain, but no deeds or other records for his ownership could be found. Worth writes in *Nantucket Lands and Landowners*, "The Swain House stands next south of Davis Hall's house on the west side, the second house south of the Corner of Chester Street. It was built by Richard Swain about 1765."

Although the house may certainly date to the second half of the eighteenth century, the earliest known record for the house dates to 1808, when John Elkins sold the property. Records for Richard Swain show Swain held property on the opposite side (east side) of North Water Street, selling it to Matthew Barney in 1853, but no record could be found regarding structures or land for 26 North Water Street or other land on the west side.

Elkins appears to have acquired several parcels of land on North Water Street during his lifetime. In January 1783 he purchased land with a house on the west side of the road from John and Kezia Coffin, who had purchased it from Jethro Gardner. It is likely this deed refers to 26 North Water Street, but no confirmation has yet been made. In 1792, a group of men—Peter Coffin, David Coffin, William Rotch, Shubael Barnard, Hezekiah Starbuck, Francis Gardner, Jonathan Burnel, and Charles Handy—sold approximately "one hundred rods of land" described as part of the Brant Point Meadow to John Elkins, for "twenty-five pounds, twelve shillings, and four pence." This land, on the east side of the highway, stretched from North Water Street to South Beach Street. In 1803, Elkins purchased from Francis Gardner "all the land that his father Grafton Gardner (1707–89) owned in the said Share." By 1810, Elkins had sold to John Pinkham, "a certain lot of Land and the dwelling House thereon Standing" that has been identified as the property across the road at 23 North Water Street.

John Elkins, a successful Nantucket merchant, was born in England in 1752. In 1772, he married Sarah Mayo (1745–1823) and they had five sons and three daughters. Five years following the death of his son-in-law, Reuben Bennett in New Orleans in 1804, John Elkins sold his daughter, Sally, the property at 26 North Water Street for $2,500. In 1809, Sally was married again to David Joy, and on October 3, 1816, the couple sold the house to Aaron Mitchell, a merchant, for $2,500. The next day, Mitchell sold the property to his brother, Jethro Mitchell, for the same amount, obviously acting as Jethro's agent.

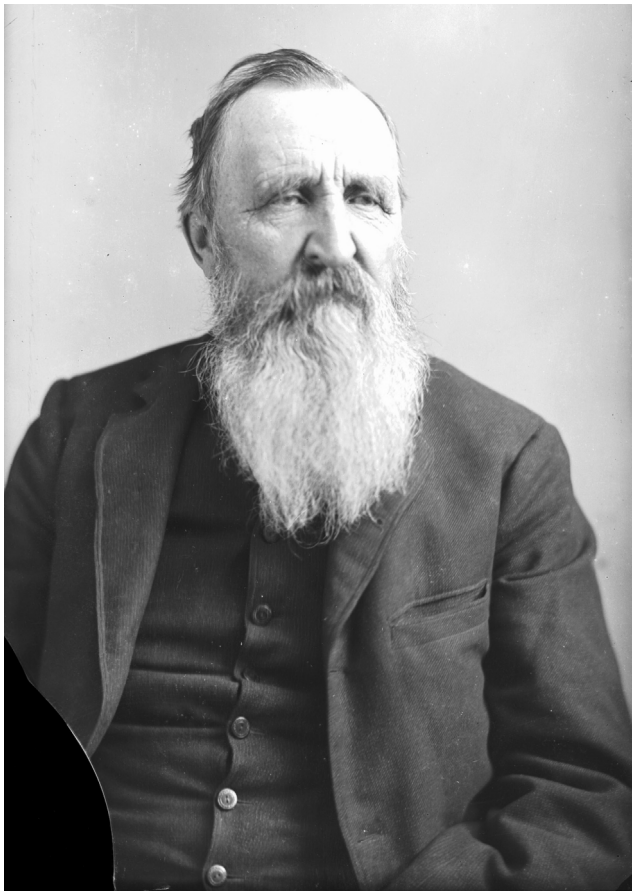
Aaron Mitchell (1778–1856) and Jethro Mitchell (1784–1833), Quakers, enjoyed great success, along with their father, Jethro (1739–1817), and brother Obed (1763–1821), as worldwide merchants of whale oil. Aaron Mitchell's residence was at 13 North Water Street. Together, they had so many children (Aaron and his wife, Mary Worth, had four, and Jethro and his wife, Mercy Greene, had ten) that North Water Street was sometimes called "Mitchell Street." In addition, their father lived at the corner of Ash Street and North Water Street.

Portrait of Love Pollard Parker attributed to William Swain, c. 1835. Love Parker was the daughter of George and Tamar (Bunker) Pollard and sister of George Pollard, captain of the Essex, sunk by a whale in 1820. Love also served as the organist of the Unitarian Church and secretary of the Ladies Howard Society.

Portrait of Robert F. Parker attributed to William Swain, c. 1835. Robert and Love Parker operated several boarding houses on island, including: the Ocean House, now the Jared Coffin House. Parker also served as Master of the Union Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons on Nantucket from 1826–1829.

In 1824, Jethro Mitchell sold the property back to his brother, Aaron, for $2,500, and in January, 16, 1826, Aaron Mitchell sold it to Robert F. Parker, a merchant, born in Nova Scotia in 1788. Parker and his wife, Love Pollard, had no children, and appear to have mortgaged the property three days later for $1,250 to the president and directors of the Citizens Bank of Nantucket. In 1842, the directors of the Citizens Bank of Nantucket and Peleg Macy, assignee of the Estate of Robert F. Parker, and Robert F. Parker, merchant, sold the property to Henry I. Defrees (DeFrieze). Like Elkins, Parker, and the Mitchell brothers, Defrees was also a merchant by trade.

At the time of purchase, Defrees had nine children, and by 1845, his tenth would arrive. Elisabeth Coffin (b. 1798) died in 1829, leaving him with four children, and with his second wife, Anna Barnard (1803–83), he had six more. After the Great Fire of 1846, the decline of whaling, and the massive exodus of families and single men from the island, Defrees's business must have suffered, and in 1847, the Citizens Bank once again sold the property to Aaron Mitchell, for $1,450.



Franklin Worth, c. 1880

Susan Parker Worth, c. 1880

Mitchell may have purchased the house at a mortgagee sale not only for investment, but because his house at 13 North Water Street had been completely destroyed in the Great Fire. By 1851, Mitchell had sold 26 North Water Street to Prince Fisher, a ship's carpenter.

Prince Fisher (1810–70) had two wives, Charlotte Chase (1810–54) and Abby Howland (b. 1815), but no children, and in 1852 he sold the 26 North Water Street property to Franklin Worth.

Franklin Worth (1812–92) married Susan Parker (1821–88) in 1841, and their two children, Valina and Benjamin, were born in 1842 and 1848; their third child, Herbert, was born in 1853, during the time the family owned the North Water Street property. Deed records show the Worths also held a summer cottage in 'Sconset.

In 1906, their son, Herbert G. Worth, transferred the property to his wife, Mary G. Worth. In 1925, having inherited the property in 1922 at the time of his wife's death, Worth sold it to Fred L. Allen with a mortgage on the property with the Nantucket Institute for Savings for $7,000.

26 North Water Street, c. 1940s

During this period, the property was used as the Island Inn, run by Alvina Gagne. In 1938, the rate was $45 a week for a double room with a private bath and a European meal plan. However, in 1941, the bank claimed the interest on the mortgage was not paid, and the property was sold to Herbert S. and Hazel Carley. In the same year, the Nantucket Institute for Savings sold "a narrow strip of land, including the bank and retaining wall along the easterly boundary of property of the grantee" (26 North Water Street) to John H. Robinson, owner of 57 Centre Street.

In May 1942, the Nantucket Board of Selectmen issued an innholder's license to the Carleys to operate the Carlisle House at 26 North Water Street. In 1953, the Carleys sold the property to Charles C. Barr and Kathleen M. C. Barr, and in 1960, the Barrs granted half interest to Noreen Shea, Kathleen Barr's sister. Kathleen M. Barr and Noreen Shea sold the property to James M. and Jeanette L. Killen in 1964. In 1980, the Killens sold the property to John W. Bausch, and in 1983, Bausch sold it to Pemisu Realty Trust. In 2007, Peter C. Conway, trustee of the Pemisu Realty Trust, sold 26 North Water Street to the current owner. NPT

26 North Water Street, c. 1960s

Prepared by Christine Harding
NANTUCKET PRESERVATION TRUST
April 2015

Historic images courtesy of the Nantucket Historical Association

26 NORTH WATER STREET: DOCUMENTED OWNERS

John Elkins	1808
Sally (Elkins) Bennett Joy	1808–09
David Joy and Sally Bennett Joy	1809–16
Aaron Mitchell	1816–17
Jethro Mitchell	1817–24
Aaron Mitchell	1824–26
Robert F. Parker	1826–42
Henry I. Defrees (DeFrieze)	1842–47
Aaron Mitchell	1847–51
Prince Fisher	1851–52
Franklin Worth	1852–92
Herbert G. Worth	1892–1925
Fred L. Allen	1925–41
Herbert S. and Hazel Carley	1941–53
Charles C. Barr and Kathleen Barr	1953–56
Charles C. Barr, Kathleen Barr, and Noreen Shea	1956–64
James M. and Jeanette L. Killen	1964–80
John W. Bausch	1980–83
Pemisu Realty Trust	1983–2007
Cassiopeia Enterprises, Inc.	2007 to present

NANTUCKET PRESERVATION TRUST

Advocates, Educates, and Celebrates the Preservation of Nantucket's Historic Architecture

This brief history is an important contribution to the island's architectural record. Documentation is one of the ways the Nantucket Preservation Trust celebrates the more than 2,400 historic homes, farms, and workplaces that contributed to the island's designation as a National Historic Landmark in 1966. By providing owners of historic houses, island residents, schoolchildren, and visitors a broad spectrum of programs and projects, we encourage the preservation of irreplaceable structures, architectural features, and cultural landscapes. Lectures, walking tours, house markers, special events, and publications—including the house histories and neighborhood histories—define our unique work on Nantucket. We hope you enjoy the history of this house, its past owners, and its place in Nantucket's remarkable architectural heritage.

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